

## BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

*[Union, South Carolina]*

HEARING # 20-11857

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

6:00 P.M.

## DOCKET NO. 2019-290-WS:

Blue Granite Water Company - Application for Approval to Adjust  
Rate Schedules and Increase Rates

TRANSCRIPT OF TESTIMONY  
AND PROCEEDINGS

VOLUME 3 OF 10

HEARING BEFORE: Comer H. 'Randy' RANDALL, *Chairman*; Florence  
P. BELSER, *Interim Vice Chairman*; and COMMISSIONERS John  
E. 'Butch' HOWARD, Thomas J. 'Tom' ERVIN, Swain E.  
WHITFIELD, and O'Neal HAMILTON

ADVISOR TO COMMISSION: Jo Anne Wessinger Hill, Esq.  
Legal Advisory Staff

STAFF: William O. Richardson and John Powers, Technical Advisory  
Staff; Patricia Stephens and Afton Ellison, Clerk's Staff; Rob  
Bockman, Public Information Officer; and Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat,  
CVR-CM/M-GNSC, Court Reporter

## APPEARANCES:

**SAMUEL J. WELLBORN, ESQUIRE**, representing BLUE  
GRANITE WATER COMPANY, APPLICANT

**LAURA R. 'BECKY' DOVER, ESQUIRE, and ROBERT  
HALL, ESQUIRE**, representing the SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, INTERVENOR

**ALEX KNOWLES, ESQUIRE**, representing the SOUTH  
CAROLINA OFFICE OF REGULATORY STAFF

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**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

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P R O C E E D I N G S

**CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Good evening, everyone. Welcome. I'm glad you're here tonight for this night hearing, and we are interested to hear what you have to say. We're here for you tonight. I want to introduce the Commissioners, first, and then we'll take appearances from the parties.

To my left, Commissioner Butch Howard, representing District 1; Commissioner O'Neal Hamilton, representing District 7. My name is Randy Randall, and I represent District 3. On my far right is Commissioner Florence Belser, who represents District 2; then Commissioner Tom Ervin, who represents District 4; and Commissioner Swain Whitfield, who represents District 5. Commissioner Justin Williams, from District 6, is currently serving our country in Iraq right now, so we always wish him good luck and Godspeed getting back.

We will – oh, I also want to recognize Rep. Doug Gilliam, who's here tonight. We appreciate you coming, Rep. Gilliam, and thanks for your interest and thanks for you to be here.

We'll take appearances from the parties now.

**MR. WELLBORN:** Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the company, I'm Sam Welborn. I'll quickly note, also,

1 that we have the President of Blue Granite Water  
2 Company here, Don Denton, along with his Vice  
3 President of Operations, Bryce Mendenhall. And we  
4 would ask that, if there are any service-related  
5 customer issues or anything that customers need to  
6 speak with the company about, they're here to  
7 answer those questions. Thank you.

8 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

9 **MR. KNOWLES:** Alex Knowles, on behalf of the  
10 Office of Regulatory Staff.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Welcome.

12 **MS. DOVER:** I'm Becky Dover, and this is  
13 Robert Hall [indicating]. We are the Assistant  
14 Consumer Advocates at the Department of Consumer  
15 Affairs. Happy to be here, and we represent the  
16 ratepayers.

17 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

18 Mr. Knowles, if you will give us your work on  
19 the instructions, and then we'll continue.

20 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** And you can pull that mic  
22 to you.

23 **MR. KNOWLES:** Yeah, that mic is fixed, so I'll  
24 just do my best to speak to y'all. Can everyone  
25 hear me okay? All right. Thank you.

1 Good evening, again. My name is Alex Knowles.  
2 I'm an attorney for the South Carolina Office of  
3 Regulatory Staff. Thank y'all for being here.

4 The Public Service Commission is hosting the  
5 hearing tonight. The agency that I work for – the  
6 Office of Regulatory Staff – is a separate State  
7 agency, and you'll hear the Office of Regulatory  
8 Staff referred to by the acronym "ORS."

9 The Commission is charged with making the  
10 final decision on the Application. ORS is charged  
11 with representing the public interest and making  
12 recommendations to the Commission.

13 This hearing is for you to share your thoughts  
14 about Blue Granite Water Company and its request to  
15 increase its rates. And the Commission scheduled  
16 this hearing because they know that this is a  
17 significant matter and they want to hear from you.  
18 What you have to say is important.

19 Please know that, if you speak tonight, what  
20 you say becomes part of the official record in this  
21 case. Your testimony will be sworn and it'll be  
22 recorded by our court reporter, Ms. Jo Wheat. The  
23 Commission will keep in mind what you say when they  
24 deliberate and make a decision in this case. All  
25 of the parties will present testimony at the merits

1 hearing, beginning on Wednesday, February 26th.  
2 And the final decision will be issued by April 2nd.

3 If you speak tonight, I may ask you some  
4 questions or the attorneys from Consumer Affairs or  
5 from the company may ask you some questions.  
6 Please don't be offended if we do. We want to  
7 learn more about what you have to say. Please also  
8 don't be offended if we do not ask follow-up  
9 questions of you.

10 All right. And I'd like to mention that the  
11 Commission is required to follow the same rules as  
12 a judge. So if you have questions for them, they  
13 might not be able to answer those questions, and  
14 we're sorry about that.

15 I'd like to mention that with me tonight from  
16 ORS is Michael Seaman-Huynh – he's standing there –  
17 so if you have any questions for us, you can speak  
18 with Mr. Seaman-Huynh. Also with us, from our  
19 Consumer Services Department is Mr. Chad Campbell.  
20 You may have seen his table in the hallway, and  
21 he's happy to speak with you. I won't be speaking  
22 with you during testimony, but myself, Michael,  
23 Chad are happy to stay here and speak with you for  
24 as long as it takes to get all your questions  
25 answered, following the hearing.

1 And if you would like to contact our agency  
2 later, ORS has a 1-800 number. That number is  
3 1-800-922-1531. Again, that's 1-800-922-1531. Our  
4 staff will be available from at least 8:30 a.m. to  
5 5 p.m. If you call not during office hours, please  
6 just leave a message. We will return your call.

7 So, with that, please remember that we're all  
8 here to listen to you tonight. Thank you for your  
9 attention.

10 And with that, Mr. Chairman, turning back to  
11 you, I'd ask that tonight's sign-in sheets be  
12 marked and entered into the record as the next  
13 hearing exhibit.

14 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Okay. The sign-in sheets  
15 will be marked and entered as Hearing Exhibit  
16 No. 9.

17 **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

19 Okay. For just a minute, before Mr. Rob  
20 Bockman starts to call names, I'm going to ask our  
21 Commission attorney, Ms. Jo Anne Wessinger Hill, to  
22 make a few comments.

23 **MS. HILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members  
24 of the Commission.

25 And I'd like to reiterate exactly some of the

1 points that ORS has also mentioned. First of all,  
2 and foremost, on behalf of the Commission, I want  
3 to thank everyone for coming out and appearing  
4 tonight at the public hearing.

5 This is a proceeding –

6 **VOICE:** Can't hear you.

7 **MS. HILL:** Oh. Can y'all hear me? I'm sorry.  
8 [Indicating.] Okay.

9 **VOICE:** Thank you, ma'am.

10 **MS. HILL:** Thank you. And thank you for  
11 coming tonight, on behalf of the Commission.

12 This is a proceeding under a Commission  
13 docket, which is No. 2019-290-WS, and it is  
14 concerning a proposed increase in rates and  
15 charges, filed by the Commission from the company,  
16 Blue Granite Water Company. Everyone can find –  
17 for your information, if you would like to access  
18 any of the transcripts in this matter, including  
19 any of the testimony that has been filed or will be  
20 filed, or any of the pleadings, you can access it  
21 from the website of the Commission, which is  
22 [www.psc.sc.gov](http://www.psc.sc.gov). You can also, if you go onto that  
23 website, you will see that there is a button that  
24 you can actually press called "Commission  
25 Calendar." There will be a hearing on this matter

1 later this month on Wednesday, February 26th. It  
2 will begin at 10 a.m., and it will continue until  
3 the hearing closes. That may take two days, three  
4 days, four days, five days, until all the evidence  
5 is received. At that particular time, that is when  
6 we will hear – the Commission will receive evidence  
7 from the company itself, also from the ORS,  
8 Consumer Affairs, and any other person or entity  
9 that is a named party, who is represented here  
10 today by their attorneys, has actually asked to  
11 participate in the proceeding.

12 Mr. Knowles also mentioned to you that this is  
13 a judicial proceeding, just as if we were sitting  
14 in a courtroom down here at Union County Courthouse  
15 or if we were sitting in the Commissioner itself.  
16 We ask that everyone please silence your phone or  
17 cut them off, so that everyone can be heard. Also,  
18 we'd like to let you know that – Mr. Knowles  
19 mentioned the Commission is subject to the Rules of  
20 Judicial Conduct. They are, by law, subject to  
21 those. That means that they are sitting here as  
22 judges. They are receiving testimony, just like  
23 the judge does at the County Courthouse. The  
24 witness comes up here, is sworn in. While – you  
25 may want to ask them questions, you can't ask a

1 judge a question; they cannot respond. Even if the  
2 Commissioners themselves wanted to respond, to  
3 clarify anything or to respond to a question, they  
4 are prohibited by law from doing so. So please do  
5 not take their inability to actually answer a  
6 question or address your concern directly in any  
7 way, shape, or form – that is required by them  
8 under the Rules of Judicial Conduct in order to  
9 maintain and ensure fairness and impartiality of  
10 the proceeding.

11 As mentioned before, this proceeding is being  
12 recorded by Ms. Wheat, the court reporter. It will  
13 be published and placed on the DMS, which is the  
14 docketing system. It will be available for anyone  
15 to see. So when you come up here, please keep that  
16 in mind. Speak clearly, and don't enter any –  
17 don't state your address or anything of that nature  
18 which would be identifying to where you actually  
19 live. You can provide information of what  
20 subdivision, town, and of course, your name. And  
21 if it needs to be spelled, please do so.

22 A couple more things, and I'll be finished,  
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 Also, whenever you come up here to speak, if  
25 you will confirm that you are a customer of Blue

Granite and exactly what type of service you are receiving, it will be helpful to the Commission.

Again, speak into the microphone. The court reporter is going to be here recording everything that you actually say.

Everyone who has signed up tonight will be given the same amount of time. It's going to be three minutes. You may not be able to see it exactly where everyone is sitting right now, but there is a clock right over here, a timekeeper, in front of the court reporter, and it has three minutes on it. You'll be able to see it there from the podium, so whenever it's your turn and your name is called by Mr. Bockman, if you'll please come up to the podium and listen to his instructions. Whenever your time is up, you'll hear a buzzer, and that's what that means. But you'll be able to see it as you're testifying, so you can kind of gauge your testimony at that particular point. Okay?

And as a final reminder, I want to let you know again – I've mentioned it, but just in case – the hearing in this case when the parties, which are the gentlepeople that just made their appearance by their counsel – which was the company

1           itself, Blue Granite, the ORS, Consumer Affairs,  
2           and anyone else who's intervened – that hearing,  
3           when they get to present their side of the story,  
4           will actually be on Wednesday, begin Wednesday,  
5           February 26th, at 10 a.m., and continue until that  
6           is completed. There will be four additional public  
7           hearings in this matter, set by the Commission.  
8           Those will be: One in Anderson on February 5th,  
9           another in Greenville on February 13th, one in York  
10          on February 20th, and then on the evening of  
11          February 27th, which is the second day of the  
12          hearing in this matter, there will be a night  
13          hearing in Columbia at 6 p.m.

14                If you testify here at this public hearing  
15                tonight – you only get one chance to testify.  
16                Just like any court proceeding, you get one bite at  
17                the apple to come up. And if you testify tonight,  
18                you cannot testify at any of those other four  
19                public hearings that are to be scheduled. There's  
20                already been two public hearings held in this  
21                matter. They were also noticed on DMS in Irmo and  
22                also Lexington. And if you have any questions, you  
23                can also find all this information I've just said,  
24                on the DMS and the Commission's website.

25                That's all, Mr. Chairman.

1                   **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

2                   **MS. HILL:** And with that, we'll call our first  
3 witness.

4                   **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Well, and I wanted to  
5 remind everyone, when you're standing at the mic,  
6 when you finish, stay there for a second because  
7 there may be questions from the parties or from the  
8 Commissioners, and we want to just make sure we're  
9 able to get you heard.

10                  So, with that, let's go to Mr. Bockman and  
11 he's going to call the witnesses.

12                  **MR. BOCKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes.  
13 I'll be calling your names in a rotation of three,  
14 meaning we will have one person at the podium,  
15 we'll have two people sitting in the chairs closest  
16 to the podium. So when you hear your name, go on  
17 ahead and come up to this first row of chairs,  
18 please.

19                  When you step up to the podium, you'll be  
20 sworn in by a representative of the Commission. At  
21 that point, your testimony will begin and you'll  
22 state your name for the record upon being sworn in,  
23 and then continue to speak.

24                  As mentioned, you will have three minutes.  
25 Upon finishing your remarks, please do remain

1 standing at the podium, as Commissioners or the  
2 parties in attendance may have questions for you.  
3 If not, you'll be able to take your seat, and the  
4 person who is sitting next up to the podium will be  
5 up. I'll continue to call those names as we go  
6 through the rotation, so you'll be able to know  
7 when you're next.

8 If you'd like to continue following this  
9 docket, I would encourage you to follow us on  
10 social media, please. You can follow the PSC  
11 profiles on Facebook and on Twitter, and the South  
12 Carolina Utility Consumer Program, which  
13 essentially offers consumer-focused information,  
14 tips, tricks, and upcoming information on Facebook  
15 and on Twitter.

16 We also do livestream all hearings, meetings,  
17 and briefings, and you can find a link to that  
18 livestream page through our website at  
19 [www.psc.sc.gov](http://www.psc.sc.gov).

20 Thank you. I will now commence our testifying  
21 attendee list with Dorothy Rodgers? Dorothy  
22 Rodgers to the podium, please, with Michelle Canada  
23 and Graham Williams up next.

24 [Witness affirmed]

25 <

1 THEREUPON came,

2 D O R O T H Y R O D G E R S ,

3 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

4 WITNESS: My name is Dorothy Rodgers. I live  
5 in the first Fairwood, Union. I've lived at this  
6 address since 1975.

7 When we first moved in there, we paid sewer  
8 every three months of \$8. Then it was sold to a  
9 company. It went up, and went up. Every so many  
10 years, it went up.

11 I'm concerned because we have one person that  
12 lives in the household; then you have another house  
13 that has two people live in it. And on down the  
14 road, you have five people in it. Why would we all  
15 have to pay the same rate? I don't think it's fair  
16 for those that are on fixed income to be charged so  
17 much for our sewage that runs down a pipe and goes  
18 down a manhole and into the treatment plant.

19 We've asked several times about having sewer –  
20 septic systems, and they said we weren't allowed to  
21 have them out there, but we do believe there is  
22 some at the end of Fairwood.

23 But I'm concerned that, like every two or  
24 three years, they come out and want this ridiculous  
25 increase. And I know they ask high so they at

1 least get a little bit. But it's not fair for a  
2 family of one to pay the same rate as two people or  
3 five people or eight people. Thank you.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Rodgers.

5 Any questions from the parties?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners, any questions?

8 [No response]

9 Thank you, Ms. Rodgers.

10 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

11 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Next we have Michelle Canada,  
12 followed by Graham Williams and Susan Cochran on  
13 deck.

14 [Witness affirmed]

15 THEREUPON came,

16 **M I C H E L L E C A N A D A ,**  
17 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

18 **WITNESS:** My name is Michelle Canada. I live  
19 in Fairwood Subdivision 1. I've lived there five  
20 years now.

21 When we first moved in, we didn't even pay a  
22 sewer bill. We got the house through a guy, he  
23 said they had a septic tank. So we just recently  
24 started getting a bill, last September. Well, at  
25 first, they told us – when I called the number –

1 they gave us a flyer. Called the number, they told  
2 us we had to pay \$600. I said, "Why would we have  
3 to pay \$600 when we never even knew about anything  
4 like this?" Well, we argued back and forth with  
5 them. They took it down to \$400-and-something.

6 I have a bill here [indicating]. This is a  
7 statement, the previous bill after we had already  
8 started paying on it, is \$333. We paid \$228 to  
9 start with. Then we still owe \$105 on it. They  
10 added another \$65, which is supposed to be the bill  
11 of the month. We've been doing this since maybe  
12 September of last year, and right now we're just  
13 getting to where we're paying the \$65.

14 Also, since they started doing this, our water  
15 level, it's gone down. You know, you flush the  
16 toilets, you've got to flush it two or three times.  
17 And we don't understand why; we didn't have this  
18 problem before.

19 And, also, when they first came out, they  
20 basically threatened to turn off our water and the  
21 sewer if we didn't pay this. So this is what, you  
22 know, we had to go through with them.

23 And like Dottie said, we don't understand why  
24 we have to pay so much. This is almost three times  
25 more than what our water bill is. And that's all

I, you know, have to say on the subject.

**CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Canada.

Any questions from the parties? Mr. Knowles.

**MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**CROSS EXAMINATION**

**BY MR. KNOWLES:**

**Q** Ms. Canada, have you spoken with ORS, by chance?

**A** No. We did call our water company, went by there. I even came up here and spoke to the Mayor about this, back, you know, when they was threatening to turn off the sewer and everything, and the water. And he said he would look into it. And we never did hear anything else, and next thing we know, the bill started going down. But we still – here's proof [indicating] where we had the first one after we had made a payment. And this was \$300-and-something to start with.

**Q** Yes, ma'am. You may want to speak with Mr. Campbell or Mr. Seaman-Huynh. This may be something that they might be able to help with.

**A** Okay, thank you.

**COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Whitfield.

**EXAMINATION**

**BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

**Q** Ms. Canada, how long did you say you had been a resident

1 of Fairwood subdivision?

2 **A** We moved in in March of 2015.

3 **Q** And when did you start – when were you given this bill  
4 that they –

5 **A** This was – the first one was near the end of 2018, and  
6 then we didn't hear anything else. This bill  
7 [indicating] is back in September of 2019.

8 **Q** And then sometime since 2018, you've noticed your water  
9 pressure?

10 **A** It's been going down.

11 **Q** When did that start?

12 **A** It started right after they started the sewer service.  
13 It – like, when I flush the toilet, sometimes we've got  
14 to flush it two or three times to get it cleared out.  
15 And the water pressure, like in the tub and the toilets,  
16 is lower now. And I called the water company about it;  
17 they said they had nothing to do with that part.

18 **Q** Well, I would certainly thank you for your testimony.  
19 And, again, as has been stated, we can't answer  
20 questions as Commissioners, but I would offer – you have  
21 the company officials here and you also have South  
22 Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff here, who can help  
23 you. And Mr. Knowles has offered to do so, so I  
24 certainly would advise you to take advantage of the  
25 resources you have here tonight. And thank you for your

1 testimony.

2 **A** Thank you.

3 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

4 Commissioners, any other questions?

5 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** Yes, sir.

6 **EXAMINATION**

7 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

8 **Q** Ms. Canada?

9 **A** Oh, sorry.

10 **Q** I'm sorry. I just want to understand. Good evening.  
11 Thank you for being here.

12 **A** Good evening.

13 **Q** When you say the water pressure is lower, is that the  
14 water coming out of the spigot, or is that the tub  
15 draining?

16 **A** It's the toilet, mostly.

17 **Q** Okay.

18 **A** And also in –

19 **Q** But it's the toilet clearing?

20 **A** Yeah. It's clearing after two or three times you flush  
21 it. And my tub, it drains fine. You know, it's just  
22 that it takes so long for the water to run – I've got a  
23 deep tub. It takes so long to run it to get, you know,  
24 get it full. And before we got the sewer system in, it  
25 wasn't like that.

1 Q And who's providing the water?

2 A Meansville-Riley Road.

3 Q It's not this company. It's not Blue Granite.

4 A They – no, they're not providing it, but they did  
5 threaten to turn my water off if we didn't pay that bill  
6 for the sewer, to start with.

7 Q Thank you, very much.

8 A You're welcome.

9 COMMISSIONER BELSER: That clarifies some  
10 things. Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, Commissioner  
12 Belser.

13 Any other questions, Commissioners?

14 [No response]

15 Thank you, ma'am.

16 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

17 MR. BOCKMAN: Next we have Graham Williams,  
18 with Susan Cochran and Myette<sub>[sic]</sub> Pruitt on deck.  
19 Susan Cochran and Myette<sub>[sic]</sub> Pruitt on deck.

20 [Witness affirmed]

21 THEREUPON came,

22 G R A H A M W I L L I A M S ,  
23 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

24 WITNESS: Graham Williams. I live in the  
25 first Fairwood, just like my neighbors. I've been

1           there since 1987.

2           Just like Dottie said, over the years, our  
3           sewer rates have gone up and up and up. My water  
4           rate has been relatively stable; right now, it's  
5           about \$25 a month. I live there by myself. At one  
6           time, I had a wife, myself, and three children. I  
7           can understand paying, you know, higher rates if  
8           you have a lot of usage. Well, it's one person.  
9           One person. I don't know what their sewer rates  
10          are, but mine is \$65, and they want to go up to  
11          \$101, a month, for sewer. You know, most places,  
12          your sewer rate is based on how much water you use.  
13          It's normally, you know – I don't know how it's  
14          dictated, but that's the way it is.

15          But my main question is, why can't you meter  
16          the usage, which would then determine you pay for  
17          what you use, instead of one flat fee? That's my  
18          question. I don't understand why we can't do that.  
19          We have meters for our water. We have meters for  
20          our electricity. Why can't we have meters for our  
21          sewer? That would be more fair.

22                **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir. Does that  
23                complete your testimony?

24                **WITNESS:** Pretty much.

25                **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

Questions from the parties?

[No response]

Commissioners?

[No response]

Thank you, Mr. Williams. Appreciate you being here.

**WITNESS:** Sure enough.

[WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

**MR. BOCKMAN:** Susan Cochran, followed by Myette<sub>[sic]</sub> Pruitt and Paul Winters on deck. Susan Cochran, Myette<sub>[sic]</sub> Pruitt, and Paul Winters on deck.

[Witness affirmed]

THEREUPON came,

**M Y R T L E P R U I T T ,**

who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

**WITNESS:** My name is Myrtle Pruitt. I live out in first Fairwood.

And I understand you're going up on our water bills, or our sewage bills, to \$105. Okay? My water bill is never over \$20. Most of the time, much under. Okay. You're going to charge me over five times as much for sewage as I'm putting in there, right? Do you think that's fair?

I'm a widow. I live alone. I'm on a fixed income, and my water bill is never over \$20, and

1           you're going to, as I said, go to \$105? And that's  
2           over five times as much as sewage I put in your  
3           sewage.

4           Another thing, you said y'all had to do a lot  
5           of work out there. I live about – and Ms. Rodgers  
6           does, too – within a rock's throw of your sewage  
7           system. Okay? I've not seen that much work going  
8           on out there. I see some, but I haven't seen a  
9           great deal of people out there working. I do see a  
10          van and a little white Ford, I think, a Ford pickup  
11          truck, sitting out there a lot of times. I don't  
12          know what he's doing; it looks like to me he's  
13          taking a nap, but –

14                           [Laughter]

15          – but he's sitting out there parked on the  
16          street, so...

17           **VOICE:** I see that same truck.

18           **VOICE:** I do, too.

19           **VOICE:** Yes.

20           **WITNESS:** He's out there a lot.

21           **VOICE:** Amen.

22           **WITNESS:** As I said, I haven't seen that much  
23          work going on down there. I can't believe you  
24          would charge me five times as much – for five times  
25          as much sewage as I'm putting in your sewage

1 system. Now, is that fair?

2 I don't think you think so, either. That's  
3 all I've got to say. Thank you.

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, ma'am.

5 Any questions from the parties?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners.

8 **EXAMINATION**

9 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

10 **Q** Ms. Pruitt? Ms. Pruitt, I'm sorry, but may I ask you a  
11 question, please?

12 **A** Yes, you may.

13 **Q** When is the last time – can you tell me about the  
14 timeframe of when you saw some work going on out there?  
15 Last month or so? Last six months? Within the last  
16 year? Do you know, if you recall?

17 **A** Well, I don't keep time with such as that. All I know  
18 is I haven't seen a lot going on down there.

19 **Q** Okay, I appreciate that. Thank you, ma'am.

20 **A** You're quite welcome. Thank you.

21 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Any other questions,  
22 Commissioners?

23 [No response]

24 Thank you, Ms. Pruitt.

25 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

1                   **MR. BOCKMAN:** Susan Cochran, Paul Winters,  
2                   Gene Riley.

3                   [Witness affirmed]

4                   THEREUPON came,

5                   **S U S A N   C O C H R A N ,**  
6                   who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

7                   **WITNESS:** I'm Susan Cochran. I live on the  
8                   corner in the first Fairwood.

9                   I see this man in his truck all the time,  
10                  sitting on the side of the road. Either he's  
11                  talking on his phone or he's asleep. So one day, I  
12                  walked over there and I – you know, I knocked on  
13                  the window, and I said, "Your drain hole up here,"  
14                  which is right across the road – right – my yard  
15                  ends, right here [indicating]; Riverhills runs  
16                  right here [indicating]. And the drain hole is  
17                  right here [indicating]. I said, "Can y'all clean  
18                  your drain hole out?" "Yeah, we'll get to it." I  
19                  said, "Okay, fine," you know.

20                  I mean, I never see them doing any work out  
21                  there at any time. And, I mean, I leave early in  
22                  the mornings, I come back at lunchtime. I leave.  
23                  I'm – I'm in and out. And he's always parked right  
24                  there on the corner; either he's asleep or talking  
25                  on the cell phone.

1 I mean, so what – and you want to raise our  
2 sewage rate up? I mean, me and my husband are the  
3 only ones that live in the house, I mean, and this  
4 is ridiculous. I mean, what is the purpose of  
5 their job out there? What is he supposed to be  
6 doing? We're paying you all for him to sit on the  
7 side of the road and sleep or talk on his cell  
8 phone? I mean, I don't understand it. I thought  
9 if you're getting paid for a job, you're supposed  
10 to be working, you're supposed to be doing  
11 something. I mean, if I'm going to sit on the side  
12 of the road, I'm not going to sit so everybody can  
13 see me. I mean, you know, at least I'd go  
14 somewhere where nobody wouldn't see me. I mean,  
15 you know, in broad daylight and somebody go over  
16 and knock on the window, you know, "Hey, can you  
17 come clean out, you know, the manhole?" I mean,  
18 it's – I mean, I've been out there 25 years and I  
19 think that manhole's been cleaned out maybe two  
20 times, the whole time I've been there. And one  
21 time, I had to ask.

22 That's all I've got to say.

23 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Ms. Cochran, thank you.  
24 Any questions from the company or Intervenors?

25 [No response]

Commissioners?

**EXAMINATION**

**BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

**Q** Is it Cochran or Cothran?

**A** Cochran, C-o-c-h-r-a-n.

**Q** Ms. Cochran, the truck, did it have any name on it? Was it –

**A** It was Blue Granite.

**Q** It said “Blue Granite”?

**A** It said – it’s –

**Q** When you went up and talked to him, was there any marking on his shirt?

**A** I didn’t pay no attention to him. I – you know.

**Q** After you asked – do you remember when it was that you asked that the manhole be cleaned out?

**A** A couple months ago.

**Q** Did it get done, or not?

**A** I think it did, or I’d’ve went back – I mean, I think it did, or I’d’ve went back.

**Q** Now – okay. Had you noticed that maybe it was – was it a manhole or drainage, do you know?

**A** It’s a manhole in the middle of the road –

**Q** Okay.

**A** – that you take the lid off of it, I mean, you know, and the pipes run to that manhole.

1 Q What were you noticing that led you to ask him to clean  
2 out the manhole?

3 A Because the stuff, I mean, it was – I was having to  
4 flush my commode like three or four or five times, you  
5 know, and – you know, and that's ridiculous. I mean, I  
6 own a lot of real estate, rental property, and I  
7 understand, you know, how plumbing and stuff go  
8 together, you know.

9 Q Have you noticed any improvement when you flush the  
10 toilet, or do you still have to do it multiple times, or  
11 is that –

12 A Every now and then. When it rains a whole lot, you've  
13 got to do it, I mean, you know.

14 Q So does that lead you to believe that they cleaned it  
15 out, that it got any better?

16 A Yeah. I mean, yes, I mean, if it hadn't – because I  
17 would have went back, because I see this man at least  
18 four or five times a day. And he's always in that one  
19 spot, right there on the corner. I back out of my  
20 driveway and I turn to go down the hill to the highway,  
21 and he's sitting right there.

22 Q Next time, you might want to ask his name, and then call  
23 the Customer Service number on your bill and let them  
24 know.

25 A Okay, I sure will.

1 Q Thank you, ma'am.

2 A Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN RANDALL: Thank you, Ms. Cochran.

4 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

5 MR. BOCKMAN: Next, we have Paul Winters.

6 Paul Winters to the podium, followed by Gene Riley  
7 and Laurie Henderson.

8 [Witness affirmed]

9 THEREUPON came,

10 P A U L W I N T E R S ,

11 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

12 WITNESS: My name is Paul Winters. I live in  
13 first Fairwood, and I also serve as the – we have a  
14 Fairwood association, homeowners' association, out  
15 there, and I've served as President of that.

16 So, a couple things, points I want to bring.  
17 And I echo the thoughts of everybody that's up  
18 here. You know, I've lived out there, we've lived  
19 out there, since 1989. And I can recall and a lot  
20 of these folks have testified when they first moved  
21 in, you know, we were paying 20 bucks every two  
22 months for sewage. Fast-forward 30 years, and now  
23 we're paying \$65 and they're wanting to go up 56  
24 percent or whatever it is.

25 And, you know, again, it goes back to what –

1           how much are we using? I mean, why can't it be  
2           metered some way? You know, if you look at the  
3           rest of the County, if you're not on septic, if  
4           you're on city water or whatever, your sewer rates  
5           are justified by that. So that's one thing that's  
6           not fair.

7           The second thing I want to bring up is, when  
8           we got notice about this, all I recall seeing in  
9           the notice is what they wanted to do as far as  
10          increase it. We've never – it was never documented  
11          on why they want to do it, so we had to do some  
12          research. And it looks like what they're saying is  
13          the added revenue would cover creation of a storm  
14          reserve fund. What is that? Legal expenses.  
15          What, are they getting sued, so we're going to have  
16          to cover the cost of that? Investments in  
17          infrastructure and costs resulting from third-party  
18          and wastewater treatment.

19          So they had an increase in 2018, so here we  
20          are two years later. What do they do with that  
21          money? Are they putting it back into the sewer  
22          system out there? I've not seen any changes in  
23          that sewer system out there. Now, I used to play  
24          golf when the golf course was open and you could,  
25          you know, be close to it, and the thing makes a lot

1 of noise. I don't know if anybody still hears a  
2 lot of the racket the thing makes. So, hey, if  
3 they're putting money into the thing, it surely  
4 would be improved and we would notice improvements  
5 out there, you know.

6 So a lot of us feel, out there, that we're -  
7 they've got a monopoly on us. We don't have a  
8 choice. If you wanted to charge \$500 a month, we  
9 probably would have to pay for it, because we can't  
10 get septic out there; it's not feasible for the  
11 City of Union to put a sewer system out there,  
12 because they'd have to cross the river, and that  
13 ain't going to happen. You know, there's only 100  
14 homes, or so, so it's probably not cost-effective  
15 for any other choice out there.

16 So, you know, we're asking this Commission for  
17 your support, to help us, because we don't have a  
18 choice. And what's going to be a challenge for all  
19 of us, and some of us has already been there, is if  
20 we get to a point we want to sell our property, you  
21 know, and we have to tell them, "Hey, you're going  
22 to have to pay another \$100 a month just to get  
23 your sewer for sewer service"? That's ridiculous.  
24 That's ridiculous.

25 So, we ask for your support and ask for your

1 help. Thank you.

2 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Mr. Winters.

3 Questions from the parties?

4 [No response]

5 Commissioners?

6 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Mr. Chairman.

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Commissioner Whitfield.

8 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** Thank you, Mr.

9 Chairman.

10 **EXAMINATION**

11 **BY COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:**

12 **Q** Mr. Winters, we have been up here before – it's been a  
13 while – for a public night hearing like this, but you  
14 made the comment you hadn't noticed any improvements in  
15 the last cycle, since 2018. When is the last time – you  
16 said you've been a resident since 1989. When is the  
17 last time you noticed any improvements, changes,  
18 anything that you've noticed other than maintenance  
19 maybe being done to the system?

20 **A** Mr. Whitfield, you know, I can honestly say – again,  
21 I've been out there for 30 years. I can honestly say  
22 that I haven't seen a marked difference in the  
23 facilities out there. And some of these other guys  
24 might can echo my thoughts, but, you know, like I said,  
25 we see guys out there maintaining the whatever they do

1 to the treatment facility. There's been occasions where  
2 they've maybe done some work on some of the manholes.  
3 But I haven't seen any marked difference out there in 30  
4 years, you know. And I surely can't tell it at our – I  
5 mean, it all flows downhill, man. I mean, come on. I  
6 mean, once it goes out the house, it's going to flow  
7 downhill. What are we going to notice?

8 **VOICE:** Only thing that changed is the rates.

9 **WITNESS:** Yeah, only thing that's changed is  
10 the rates.

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Please wait until you're up  
12 here to speak. Thank you.

13 **COMMISSIONER WHITFIELD:** That's all I have,  
14 Mr. Chairman.

15 Thank you for your testimony.

16 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

17 **EXAMINATION**

18 **BY COMMISSIONER BELSER:**

19 **Q** Mr. Winters, you said you were involved with the  
20 homeowners' association?

21 **A** Yes, ma'am.

22 **Q** Can you tell me how many homes are in this subdivision?

23 **A** Approximately, 100, if you count both sides.

24 **Q** When you say both sides, is that –

25 **A** Well, with Fairwood 1 and Fairwood 2. Now, there are

1 some of the homes on Fairwood 2 – the golf course side,  
2 the ex- – the old golf course side – they have septic.  
3 So not everybody's on the system out there. And I don't  
4 understand why, but I just know that some of them  
5 aren't.

6 **COMMISSIONER BELSER:** Thank you, very much.

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

8 Thank you, Mr. Winters.

9 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

10 **MR. BOCKMAN:** We have Gene Riley? Gene Riley,  
11 followed by Laurie Henderson.

12 [Witness affirmed]

13 THEREUPON came,

14 **G E N E R I L E Y ,**

15 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

16 **WITNESS:** my name is Gene Riley. I live in  
17 the first Fairwood or the old Fairwood, some of us  
18 call it. I've been there since about 1982.

19 I've seen no change in our sewer service since  
20 I've been out there, as someone else just stated.  
21 The only changes we've seen is in the rates.

22 There's often – the truck that Ms. Rodgers and  
23 Ms. Cochran alluded to, I see it out there all the  
24 time parked on the side of the road. I don't know  
25 what that fellow is doing, but he spends a lot of

1 time sitting in his truck, I tell you that. I used  
2 to ride a four-wheeler and I would go down where  
3 their little facility is, where they actually  
4 process the waste. Sometimes there's somebody's  
5 there, but a lot of the time there's nobody down  
6 there. And I haven't seen anybody doing anything  
7 other than possibly maintaining the system. I  
8 haven't seen any kind of major work on the system,  
9 any attempt to improve the system, or anything  
10 along those lines.

11 I have a cleanout plug in my yard – I guess  
12 that's what they call it. And once or twice a  
13 year, every year, the line, the main line gets  
14 stopped up and it backs up, and it blows the top  
15 off that cleanout plug in my front yard. And guess  
16 what's all over my yard. You get the idea? That's  
17 real nice, isn't it?

18 Now, I call them. They don't have anybody  
19 that works for them, apparently, that can do  
20 anything about this. They have to call Drains,  
21 Incorporated, or somebody like that, out of either  
22 Spartanburg or Greenville. And in a few hours,  
23 hopefully, they'll be there to do something about  
24 it.

25 But this happens regularly. They tell me the

1 roots get in the main line out there that runs down  
2 under the middle of our street. I live on Pineland  
3 Avenue. And they'll come and it takes them usually  
4 several hours to get the clog fixed. If –  
5 sometimes the top is on – I know – by the way, I  
6 usually know there's a problem, because my bathtub  
7 and my commode start bubbling. I was in the shower  
8 one day and I heard a bubbling sound; it was my  
9 commode. It was bubbling in my commode. I said,  
10 "Oh, gosh, I'd better go out and check the plug."  
11 And sure enough, I go out in the yard, and there's  
12 waste all over my yard, sewage waste all over my  
13 yard.

14 I think that's just ridiculous. This  
15 situation here has existed for years. They've done  
16 nothing to improve it. They hire somebody and send  
17 them out there to clear the clog, and that's fine  
18 until the next one occurs.

19 [3-minute signal]

20 There's been no improvements in the system,  
21 folks. I don't know what they're telling you or  
22 what they're claiming, but there's been no  
23 improvements that we can see in the system.

24 Now, I'm 75 years old. My wife is, too. I'll  
25 be 75 shortly and she's already 75. There's only

1 two of us in our house. You're telling me we  
2 create enough sewage it costs \$65 to process it? I  
3 don't believe it. I do not believe it. If it  
4 costs you that much, you're doing something wrong.  
5 And now you want to go up to \$105? My wife and I  
6 are –

7 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Mr. Riley, we've gotten to  
8 your three minutes. We appreciate your testimony.

9 **WITNESS:** Well, let me say one other thing. I  
10 think is important. Please, give me –

11 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Go ahead.

12 **WITNESS:** My wife and I are retired. We live  
13 on a fixed income. There's a lot of other folks in  
14 our neighborhood that they're in the same boat.  
15 Now, when I was younger, when I was working, if my  
16 living expenses went up, I could work harder. I  
17 could work more hours. I was in sales. I was a  
18 commissioned salesperson most of my life, and I  
19 could go out there and hustle and make more money  
20 if I needed to, just about anytime I needed to, if  
21 I would really get after it. I can't do that now.  
22 I got Social Security and I got a little National  
23 Guard pension. The other retirement I had  
24 disappeared in a cloud of smoke back in '07 when we  
25 had some big problems.

1                   So, there we are. I can't pay it. I'll be  
2                   honest with you, I can't pay \$105 a month. I'll  
3                   have to give my house away, probably, and move into  
4                   public housing or something. I don't know what  
5                   we're going to do if they're granted this increase.  
6                   It's hard to pay \$65 a month, but \$105 a month is  
7                   just out of the question.

8                   **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir.

9                   **WITNESS:** Thank you, sir.

10                  **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Hang on one second. Let me  
11                  see if there are any questions.

12                  **WITNESS:** Oh, yes.

13                  **MR. WELLBORN:** Mr. Chairman, just as for the  
14                  backup issues, I would encourage Mr. Riley to, you  
15                  know, come over to the company and see if they can  
16                  work that out.

17                  **WITNESS:** Well, I've talked with them – I've  
18                  talked with your Customer Service numerous times,  
19                  and they send somebody to clear it, and that's the  
20                  end of it.

21                  **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Well, we've got folks here  
22                  tonight, and we've got members from the Office of  
23                  Regulatory Staff, so I'd encourage you to talk to  
24                  both of them.

25                  **WITNESS:** All right. Thank you. Will do.

1                   **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir.

2                   **WITNESS:** Thank you.

3                   **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Anybody – Commissioners,  
4 anything? Mr. Knowles?

5                   **MR. KNOWLES:** Mr. Riley, I'd just echo  
6 Chairman Randall.

7                   **WITNESS:** Yes, sir. I'm sorry.

8                   **MR. KNOWLES:** I hope you'll talk with the  
9 Office of Regulatory Staff.

10                  **WITNESS:** Okay.

11                  **MR. KNOWLES:** Thank you.

12                  **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, sir.

13                               [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

14                  **MR. BOCKMAN:** Laurie Henderson? Laurie  
15 Henderson to the podium, please.

16                               [Witness affirmed]

17 THEREUPON came,

18                               **L A U R I E   H E N D E R S O N ,**

19 who, having been first duly affirmed, testified as follows:

20                  **WITNESS:** My name is Laurie Henderson. I live  
21 at 141 Pineland Avenue, which is the first  
22 Fairwood.

23                  I agree with everyone that has stood up here  
24 tonight. My husband and I, we've been residing at  
25 Fairwood, 141 Pineland Avenue, since '97. When we

1 moved out there, our sewage bill was \$37. We got –  
2 they got an increase about four, maybe five years  
3 later. Then they got another increase, another  
4 couple years later.

5 When we moved out there, from '97 all the way  
6 until 2015 – I'm thinking, if my math is correct,  
7 2015 or 2016 – I used to walk down the street,  
8 which is probably not even 100 feet from my house  
9 to the golf course where United Utilities/Blue  
10 Granite, the sewage treatment is. I used to walk  
11 on the golf course, me and my kids. I would see  
12 somebody down there, but by the time I get from one  
13 end of the golf course back to the sewer system,  
14 they're gone.

15 I used to cut the grass on the side of the  
16 road, on Riverhills, where several of them have  
17 stated that they would see the truck, the United  
18 Utility truck parked on the side, or either Blue  
19 Granite. I haven't cut the grass in a couple  
20 years. But I have actually asked people that were  
21 sitting in the truck – a young man – to actually  
22 move his truck so I can cut that part of the grass.

23 Now, I've spoken to two people out in Fairwood  
24 2. One of them, which is working second shift,  
25 stated that if they were off today they would be

1 here. One of them that does my nails stay in  
2 Fairwood 2, stated that they have a septic tank.  
3 Why is it that they can get a septic tank and we  
4 can't?

5 Several of these people that stood said they  
6 only have one, two, possibly three people in their  
7 household. There's five living in my household.  
8 And I may be incriminating myself, giving this  
9 fact, but my husband and I, and we have – we're  
10 raising three of our grandchildren. I'm on  
11 disability, fixed income. We get possibly a \$20  
12 increase, cost-of-living increase, a year. Am I  
13 supposed to take my little \$20 and pay Blue Granite  
14 just because they want an increase? Like they  
15 said, the people in the truck, they're sitting on  
16 the side of the road way longer than they are down  
17 there at the treatment plant, the treatment  
18 section. They're down there probably enough time  
19 to put a drop of chlorine in the system.

20 [3-minute signal]

21 So, Mr. Riley, he stated that his sewage  
22 overruns in the thing. I live two houses below  
23 him. I've witnessed that. I walk my dog around  
24 the neighborhood. My dog has actually reached out  
25 on the leash trying to get the waste that's in his

1 yard. Is that fair to me? Is that fair to my dog?  
2 Yes, I can pull him back, but should I have to  
3 because you all are negligent at doing your job?

4 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you, Ms. Henderson.  
5 Any questions from the parties?

6 [No response]

7 Commissioners.

8 [No response]

9 Thank you, ma'am. Thank you for your  
10 testimony.

11 [WHEREUPON, the witness was excused.]

12 **MR. BOCKMAN:** Mr. Chairman, that concludes the  
13 list of attendees who have signed up to testify  
14 this evening.

15 **CHAIRMAN RANDALL:** Thank you.

16 We want to thank everyone for coming tonight.  
17 We appreciate your being here.

18 As you heard, the merits hearing on this case  
19 will be the 26th of this month, in Columbia. So  
20 with that, we are adjourned.

21 [WHEREUPON, at 6:45 p.m., the hearing in  
22 the above-entitled matter was adjourned,  
23 to reconvene on February 13, 2020, at  
24 6:00 p.m., in Greenville, South  
25 Carolina.]

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[WHEREUPON, Hearing Exhibit No. 9 was  
marked and received in evidence.]

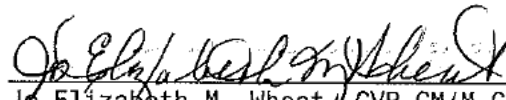
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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM-GNSC, Notary Public in and for the State of South Carolina, do hereby certify that the foregoing is, to the best of my skill and ability, a true and correct transcript of all the proceedings had and testimony adduced in a public evening hearing held in the above-captioned matter before the PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA;

That the witnesses appearing during said hearing were sworn or affirmed to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, on this the 11<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2020.

  
 Jo Elizabeth M. Wheat, CVR-CM/M-GNSC  
 Hearings Reporter, PSC/SC